

# 26-Year-Old Elected to Congress

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the 14th in a series of articles drawn from a forthcoming biography which Congressman Jenkins is preparing on lawyer-politician Albert Gallatin Jenkins. General Jenkins was born and brought up in Greenbottom, and is buried in Spring Hill Cemetery in Huntington.

By CONGRESSMAN  
KEN HECHLER

As the fourth Thursday in May, 1857, dawned, the voters from the State of Virginia trooped to the polls to elect their members of the House of Representatives. In 19 counties, stretching from Huntington to Elkins and from Charleston to Parkersburg, nearly 15,000 vot-

ers were casting their ballots to elect a new Congressman. John S. Carlile of the American or Know-nothing Party should serve another term, or whether Carlile should be replaced by a 26-year-old Cabell County lawyer named Albert Gallatin Jenkins.

Kanawha County was Congressman Carlile's stronghold, vigorous support of the Kanawha Valley Star. The incumbent Congressman Carlile also had heavy strength in Mason County, despite the fact that Jenkins lived only two miles south of the Mason County line

at Greenbottom. Boone and Wood counties also were areas where Carlile counted on to score heavily. In Wood County, although Jenkins had the Parkersburg News on his side, Carlile could count on the powerful Parkersburg Gazette as his spokesman.

While holding good strength in his home county of Cabell, Jenkins counted on such far-away counties as Doddridge, Barbour and Calhoun to give him substantial majorities. Ritchie, now a heavily Republican County, also was counted by

Democratic Jenkins as being in his column.

**Victory Is Jenkins'**

The more populous counties like Cabell, Kanawha and Wood counted their votes early and the preliminary returns from these counties were available within a few days. It was apparent that the early returns pointed to a Jenkins victory, although not by any means by a landslide. The young lawyer sweated out the tense wait-

ing period, eagerly seizing on each late bulletin and dispatch from his lieutenants in other counties to try to figure out how the returns would stack up. Jenkins knew that victory was his when he added up the returns from Cabell, Kanawha, Putnam and Mason and Jackson counties, which revealed that in these five counties which Congressman Carlile had carried by 1,127 votes in 1855, Jenkins in 1857 had cut down Carlile's margin to a slim 198.

By June 2, 1857, the Kanawha Valley Star could state definitely: "It is with feelings of pleasure that we announce the election to Congress of that

young champion of Democracy, Albert G. Jenkins, Esq., of Cabell County."

The official returns by county showed how hard-fought Jenkins victory was:

County	Jenkins	Carlile
Cabell	550	335
Putnam	348	351
Mason	338	532
Jackson	514	446
Wood	693	778
Kanawha	367	694
Roane	303	381
Harrison	653	728
Ritchie	314	210
Wirt	241	171
Doddridge	374	108
Lewis	662	344
Barbour	265	395
Upshur	461	300
Tucker	93	23
Braxton	181	535
Randolph	334	331
Calhoun	263	69
Gilmer	233	155
	7,752	6,773

Thus, Jenkins turned an 1855 Carlile victory of 600 into a Democratic majority of 979. He prepared to take his seat as the youngest member of the House of Representatives in the entire nation, being 26 years old in a body where the U. S. Constitution requires the minimum age to be 25.

**Holds "Thank You" Tour**

The alert Jenkins probably was the first candidate in history to launch a "Thank You" tour immediately after his election. The Parkersburg News, in its June 19, 1857, issue, noted: "Hon. Albert H. Jenkins was in town this week, apparently in excellent humor, and in recognition of the congratulations of his friends on the result of the canvass."

The position of Mr. Jenkins was not at first an easy one. Key Star stated it this way:

The combat was with a man servile to the enthusiasm of popular avarice. He had his recent success and all influence of his position and patronage. He had a ready-made storm of indignation against state taxation. The scheme of alleviation by confiscating the public domain was also ready-made to his hand; and he soon grew notorious wherever public grumbling could be propitiated by public plunder.

If there was one thing more than another that qualified Mr. Jenkins for the position, it was his intellectual intrepidity. The sincere conviction and the bold denunciation of the falsehoods, at the very first, attracted to

him the public heart. The faculty of mastering difficult truths, high as it is, is inferior to the faculty of communicating them. Mr. Jenkins has the rare combination of both faculties.

Mr. Jenkins has widely enlightened, impressed and influenced the popular mind in this district.

Perhaps the key to the Jenkins victory lay not alone in one factor. But certainly his organizing ability, his earnest energy in debate, and his rare ability to speak the people's language while he mastered the factual basis for his arguments were the biggest elements in his success.

Naturally enough, the proudest man of all was his 80-year-old father, Captain William M. Jenkins.